

INTRODUCTION

IRANIAN IDENTITY BOUNDARIES

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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IN THE STORY OF ROSTAM AND SOHRAB in the *Shahnameh*, the poet Ferdowsi a millennium ago gives us a tale of a tragic quest, which contains subtle allusions to the complexities of Iranian identity.¹ Sohrab, a youth then in his early teens, questions his mother about his own identity before setting off to the land of Iran on a search for his father Rostam:

He came to his mother furiously asking her,
Tell me the truth!
How is it that I am bigger than children of my age?
That I am so tall my head touches the sky?
Whose seed am I and of what origin (*gowhar*)?
What shall I say when they ask what is my father's name?²

Sohrab is a love child of Rostam, the redoubtable champion (*pahlavan*) and king-maker of Kayanid Iran, and Tahmineh, the beautiful and wise daughter of the king of Samangan, a peripheral buffer state between Iran and Turan. A valiant warrior and like his father a giant of a man, he enters the services of the Turanid king Afrasiyab, the archenemy of Iran, who unbeknownst of Sohrab's origin furnishes him with an army. His calculated objective is to destroy Rostam at the hand of the young and formidable Sohrab. Once that is achieved, the king of Turan speculated, Sohrab too could be conveniently eliminated.

Sohrab's intention however is very different. He was to seek his father and with his help first remove the unworthy Iranian king Kay Kavus from his throne and then bring to end Afrasiyab's rule—hence reversing the course that many centuries earlier divided the people of Iran from the people of Turan. This was a seminal division in the dawn of the mythical past set the Iranians forever apart from the “non-Iranians” (*aniran*).

When Rostam is the father, I the son,
Who else in the world should wear the crown?³

On his first sortie to Iran, having been deceived by the Iranian frontier satrap Hojir, Sohrab despite the best of his intentions is denied a chance to identify his father. Even when he points afar at Rostam's magnificent tent in the Iranian camp and inquires about the identity of the most formidable of the Iranian champions, Hojir opts not to reveal Rostam's identity, presumably knowing his misgivings about the Iranian king and the dangers of the union of the father and the son for the survival of the Iranian state. Remarkable in the making of the tragedy, Rostam too, almost deliberately, fails to identify his son Sohrab despite many circumstantial hints. Sohrab asks the formidable warrior about the legendary champion Rostam whom he is seeking. Just before engaging in a fatal one-to-one fight with Rostam, Sohrab again repeats his question:

Tell me, I have a single question,
But you must answer it in utter honesty.
I now believe you are Rostam
Who is of the house of Nariman; aren't you?
Rostam replied: "I am not Rostam,
Nor am I from the house of Sam.
For he is the champion and I am less than he,
Nor have I the throne, the crown, and the fortune."⁴

In the first round Sohrab prevails but generously spares Rostam's life once the crafty warrior manages to trick the young challenger to comply by the rules of Iranian chivalry. In the second round, however, when Rostam prevails he spares no time in thrusting his dagger at the side of Sohrab and fatally wounding him. Only then, as we are led to believe, he discovers the real identity of his victim when he sees the seal he had given to Tahmineh at the time of his departure from Samangan when Rostam urged her to fasten it on the arm of his not-yet-born son as a mark of his future identification.

The mythological (and Freudian) dimension of the tragedy aside, the Sohrab legend may also be read for its politico-cultural message. Rostam's failure to recognize his son is all the more puzzling given that he too, like Sohrab, was not from Iran proper (*Iran-zamin*) but from the frontier land of Zabolestan (or Sagesstan) where his family, the house of Nariman, were the autonomous rulers. His house had served the Iranian monarchy since the time of Manuchehr at moments of peril when the very survival of the Iranian state was at stake. Yet Rostam had deep misgivings toward the Iranian king, Kay Kavus, whom he viewed as erratic, deceptive, and unworthy of the Iranian throne, sentiments that later were reaffirmed in the tragedy of Siyavush.

Rostam thus could have been a potential ally to Sohrab in his desire to put an end to Kay Kavus' rule had it not been for the pressure from his fellow peers. His apparent failure to recognize Sohrab, we are told, was out of sheer bad luck or, as Ferdowsi has it, because of the dictates of blind fate. Yet in the *Shahnameh* Rostam repeatedly is praised for his sagacity and foresight: qualities that should have saved him from a tragic error of misidentification. Furthermore, his instantaneous killing of Sohrab in the second round is not compatible with Rostam's pride in upholding chivalrous valor. All these may be taken as evidence of Rostam's deceit, which made him deliberately refuse to recognize the identity of his son.

We may take Sohrab's quest as a search for identity beyond the sharp divide in the legend between Iran and "non-Iran." He is a fresh voice from the people of the periphery who, by seeking a father in Rostam, is in search of familial ties across the porous boundaries of the two lands. The state-dominated division between the Iranian Self and the non-Iranian Other came after a vengeful fratricide many mythical generations back. Of all the people, Sohrab's quest thus was nipped in the bud by his own father. As such Rostam may be seen not only as a guarantor of Iran's territorial integrity and restorer of its sovereignty but as a champion of the Iranian self-asserting identity that resists powerful personal, familial, and ethnic appeals undermining the very essence of a constructed Self. Rostam, it thus may be argued, had no option but to deny his own fatherly sentiments, in effect his own peripheral identity, and his son's appeal for a cross-national recognition, in order to preserve a coherent center. This center was crystallized, for better or for worse, in the Iranian state even if an unworthy ruler heads the state, detested in the *Shahnameh* itself. Read in this way, the legend reflects an inherent tension in the reality of Iranian history whereby the ethnic, tribal, and denominational differences were to be subordinated, often sacrificed, through the force of the state for a larger communal identity as a whole.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AS A CONSTRUCT

Tension between the center and periphery is a familiar theme traceable through the five centuries of early modern and modern history of Iran. Starting with the state-promoted Shi'ism in the Safavid era (1501–1736) and all through to the twentieth century, the discourse of identity is a perpetual themes in Iranian history. In the Pahlavi era (1921–1979) conscious, and largely homogenizing, national identity (*hoviyyat-e melli*) relied on territorial integrity and national sovereignty as well as shared memories. As in the legend of the *Shahnameh*, here too the contingency for a state-sponsored ideology of nationalism sacrificed many peripheral expressions of diversity to legitimize the authority of the state and instill in its citizens values of pride and patriotism. Grounded in a repository of collective memories and shared symbols and experiences, the state helped shape a national identity by appropriating and misappropriating many elements from Iran's cultural past.⁵

Yet as Eric Hobsbawm notes, the process of the state imposing a national identity is a "dual phenomenon," which though "constructed essentially from above, [it] cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist."⁶ Iranian identity, it can be argued, interacting with the authority of the state and its associated elites, also acquired a life of its own, somewhat independent of the sources of power and at time against the state. This was not without its historical reasons and the complex cultural ground on which Iranian identity was assembled.

It goes without saying that identity formation has not taken shape, and perhaps could not, if it was not because of encounters with neighboring communities and countries. Iranian Othering thus is not, in most ways, unique. Historically they became conscious of themselves in the face of the mythical Turanids and later the historic people they came into contact with: the Greeks, Arabs, Turks, Mongols, and others. In Europe there were as much, if not more, deliberate Othering: the

English versus the French and the Irish, the French versus the English and the Germans, the Poles and Ukrainians versus the Russians. Outside Europe, there were the Vietnamese versus the Chinese and of course the Japanese versus the Chinese. Even in newer nations, the same process fully manifests itself in the Indo-Pakistani feud, India-China confrontation, Turkish-Greek hostilities, and Kurdish-Arab and Turkish-Kurdish tensions. More recent examples are the Serb-Bosnian and Serb-Croat conflicts and, even more tragic, the clan warfare in Rwanda and the ensuing genocide. We may thus confirm that nations are made, and by extension national identities made, often through hostile encounters between neighboring societies and cultures. They share commonalities but also are more sensitive of their differences.

LEGACY OF AN ANCIENT PAST

Emphasis on the role of the state as the enforcer of a collective identity made it a common practice, almost a formulaic exercise, to return to ancient roots whenever we speak of the Iranian identity. On the surface this may seem merely a vainglorious exercise sponsored by the Pahlavi state and for the benefit of its nationalist project. Yet identification with the Iranian ancient past, whether imagined or real, goes a very long way in the Persian historiography and in literature and in the Iranian collective memory. One need to look at the vast number of chronicles from the tenth century on such as *Tārikh-e Bal'ami* (itself based on Jarir Tabari's monumental *Tārikh al-Rusul wa'l Muluk*). Idealization of Persian kingship as the fulcrum of state institution in these accounts as well as in the "mirror" literature (*andarz*) portrayed methods and practices of governance to be learned by rulers of the Islamic era. Epics such as the *Shahnameh*, and their narrative of legendary dynasties, moreover, were seen as models for kingly conduct and sources of national awareness among the elite and later the nonelite.

It is important to note that for at least two and half millennia Iranians called their land Iran, even though the Avestan notion of Iran may have originally fallen outside the territorial boundaries of Iran proper. People of the Iranian plateau also shared a certain ethnic and even religious affinity with their land even though it was only from 1935 that *Iran* replaced *Persia* in Western languages as the country's nomenclature.⁷ At least since the third century CE there was a well-defined political concept, an imperial entity with a centralized authority, called *Iranshahr* (Kingdom of Iran) and located it in *Iranzamin* (the land of Iran). Etymologically *shahr* from the Middle Persian *Xshay* literary means "where the authority of the shah (i.e., the state) is current." This is a concept different from the Greek *polis* for *shahr* gives primacy to the authority of an imperial state rather than defining the city-state. Moreover whereas *shah* (from the ancient Persian *Xshayatiya*) can be rendered as the "one who is self-merited" in his royal authority, the notion of people of the kingdom (*shahrband*) in Persian was not entirely absent. The term may imply that people of Iranshahr were primarily bound (*band*) to the authority of the state. The Iranshahr of the Sasanian era no doubt was modified, if not altogether lost, after the Arab conquest of the seventh century. It was politically dismembered for many centuries within the provincial system of the Islamic caliphate and later as parts of the kingdoms of emirs and sultans of various ethnic stocks. Yet memories of Iran and Iranshahr did not entirely fade. Legends and historical chronicles as well as

poetic tradition preserved much of it in segments and episodes, scattered though a vast body of written and oral texts.⁸

It is possible to argue that the act of remembering a cultural past and identifying with its real or imagined accomplishments is particularly strong in critical junctures. During times of social upheaval when the state no longer is capable or willing to safeguard and enforce a collective identity, memories are preserved through popular legends and poetic narrative. Despite a century or so of Umayyad hegemony (661–750) with a clear policy of Arab supremacy, people of the former provinces of the Sasanian Iran, being of the Iranian descent or not, remembered the pre-Islamic past. Memories of the Sasanian kings as ideal models of governance served as a subtle strategy of ethno-cultural differentiation between the Arabs, stuck proud of their Arabian tribal ties, and their Iranian clients. Many in the service of the Umayyad and later the Abbasid caliphate further replicated institutions of the Sasanian times and promoted their courtly manners and practices.

During the Samanid era (ninth and tenth centuries) in greater Khurasan and Transoxania, one of the earliest attempts to collect pre-Islamic Iranian legends was made under a local governor from the Iranian landed gentry (*dehghans*). Only the “Introduction” (*moqaddameh*) of this work, named after its patron Abu-Mansur Muhammad Tusi as Abu-Mansuri *Shahnameh*, is extant. One of the earliest examples of modern Persian prose composed in 957 and a major source for Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*, the “Introduction” to this collection of ancient narratives of Persian kings places Iranshahr within a mythological geography. The author, a first-generation Muslim whose father had converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam, locates Iranshahr at the heart of the central clime, as a vast entity that stretches from the “Oxus river” to the “Egypt river,” presumably from the Amu Darya (in today’s Uzbekistan) to the Nile. It is surrounded by the land of the Turks, China, India, Russia, Slavic lands (*Soglab*), Byzantium (*Rum*), the land of Berbers, and Yemen.⁹

Yet the act of “Othering” throughout premodern Iranian times versus conquerors of the non-Persian origins—whether of Arab, Turkish, and Mongolian ethnicities—often complemented with a desire to convert their new political masters to the “civilized” ways of the ancient Iranians. This was a tendency to include rather than exclude. Less than a century after the rise of the Abbasids, the decline of the institution of caliphate as a supreme religiopolitical authority, made the alternative Persian kingship the predominant model of governance throughout the Islamic world all the way up to modern times. The idealization of the Persian kingship, that of the Khusrowian Kings (*Moluk-e Kesra*)—as the Sasanian rulers were known in Arabic and Persian literature—preoccupied the pro-Persian literati. During the heated Shu’ubiyya cultural war in the eighth and ninth centuries these proud memories further highlighted against advocates of Arab supremacy.¹⁰

Even among those who fully absorbed the emerging Arabic-Islamic culture, memories of the Iranian past were not entirely forgotten. The narrative of the “prophets and kings” (*rusul wa’l muluk*) in classic world histories of the early Islamic period as well as in the classical Arabic *adab* literature revered the Persian legendary kings and the tradition of statecraft. Historians such as al-Tabari and al-Mas’udi recorded with accuracy the Persian political past as part of a living memory that resonated with their readers. As an inseparable part of Muslim narrative, Persian kingship contributed also in later generations to historical awareness of such

thinkers as the tenth-century Ibn Meskuya (Arabicized as Ibn Miskawayh) and the great fourteenth-century Tunisian philosopher of history 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn Khaldun. Even as late as the seventeenth century the Ottoman polyglot and scholar Avliya Kateb Chelebi was at home with the Persian royal tradition.¹¹

Among the Shu'ubiyya of the Iranian descent remembrance of the pre-Islamic past was not limited to contrasting the presumed Sasanian imperial splendor with the backwardness of the Arabs of the desert. Especially at the time of crisis of the Islamic caliphate the Iranian Shu'ubiyya were often associated with skepticism, heresy, and disbelief (*elhad*): tendencies categorized under the general rubric of *zandaqa*. The freethinking trait that persisted for centuries in the Iranian milieu helped fuse elements of Manichaeism and Zorvanite heresy, even memories of Zoroastrian past, into a broad, confused but still conscious, form of Persian identity.¹² What is more, the *zandaqa* of the Iranian Shu'ubiyya at times was linked not merely with the literati elite but with the ordinary folks. The well-known anti-Shu'ubiyya authors such as Jahiz and Ibn Qutayba—the latter himself of mixed Iranian stock—were mindful of the persistence of heretical Iranian tendencies among the “inferior people” of the countryside and among the urban “riffraff.” The disparaging attitude of these authors may well speak of the persistence of a cultural awareness not only among the Iranian elite but also at the grassroots. Despite rapid Islamicization of the Iranian world and despite the predominance of Arabic “high culture,” the Persian identity of what today we may call the subaltern persisted. The Iranian revival movements of the seventh and eighth centuries and even the proto-Shi'i tendencies of the period such as the Kaysaniyya movement shared not only memories of the Iranian past but clear elements of the *zandaqa* beliefs.¹³

Revival of Persian as a literary medium further contributed to retrieving and reimagining pre-Islamic memories as it emerged in the princely courts of Khurasan and Central Asia. Evolving from the Middle Persian of the Sasanian era, the new Persian (later to be known as Farsi and Dari) exhibited great facility in adopting the Arabic script and modifying it to its own needs. It also successfully adopted Arabic technical words to enrich its vocabulary and replace older terms, at times no doubt excessively. Yet Persian barely ever lost its coherence as a language of conversation and text, both prose and poetry. It employed moreover some of the Arabic poetical techniques and meters to launch a thriving poetic tradition of its own. Some notable innovations in form and expression however harkened back to the lyrical and epic poetry of the Sasanian era.¹⁴

As a new vernacular, a hallmark of a cultural revival, Persian thrived from the ninth century onward in the local courts of Khurasan of which the Samanids and Ghaznavids are the most well known. Revived Persian generated a nostalgic sense of identity not only among the literati and the landed nobility that patronized it but among the ordinary people in cities and in the countryside. Composition of the *Shahnameh* by Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi in this cultural climate was not an accident. As “the book of the kings” it served as a model and norm for legitimizing the Samanid emirate and later the imperial Ghaznavid sultanate. For centuries afterward successive dynasties, mostly of non-Persian origins, from the Ilkhanids in the thirteenth century, the Timurid in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Ottomans in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Mughals of India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Safavids, Afsharids, Zand, and the

Qajars in Iran, relied on the *Shahnameh* not only for its epic tales and its captivating storytelling values but as a supreme model for governance.

The blooming of Persian literature in Iran and Transoxania in the tenth and eleventh centuries did not happen in a lacuna. It came after nearly three centuries of development of colloquial Persian. While in the heydays of the Islamic caliphate Arabic prevailed as the language of the *divan* and among the religious elite, Persian first became the language of the downtrodden, the marginalized, and the minorities. It is remarkable to note that earliest oral traces of modern Persian are to be found in popular songs and couplets preserved among the peasants, nomads, shepherds, and the people of the street. Traces of what generally is defined as *Fahlaviyat*, the Arabicized term for poems, often couplets, in dialects of the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) is evident in the Bakhtiyari, Lori and other Persian dialects of the Iranian plateau. More pronounced it is visible in the folk poetry of the eleventh-century Baba Taher of Hamadan. The earliest written specimens of Persian moreover, going back to the eighth century, are not found in Arabic script, as one may expect, but in Judeo-Persian and Soghdian Manichean scripts. The Judeo-Persian commercial and legal documents found as far east as the Irano-Chinese frontiers and as far south as the Persian Gulf demonstrate the use of Persian local dialects among Jewish traders with a wide network stretching as far east as today's Xinxiang and as far west as Egypt.¹⁵

The shift from the humble origins of modern Persian as a language of commerce, conversation, and pastoral poetry into the language of high culture was not unexpected. In a remarkably short time Persia was capable of producing the panegyric poetry of great complexity in Khurasan of the tenth century and monumental epic romance such as the *Shahnameh*. This shift to some degree was the outcome of the fragmentation of the caliphate. Specifically it was the outcome of the patronage of the Samanids and other *dehghan* landed gentry of greater Khurasan. As a medium of communication and commerce it acquired the ability to absorb and enrich its vocabulary and its conceptual range. With its easily accessible grammatical rudiment, Persian as a language of the ordinary people was more open to linguistic democratization. Its pragmatic side served it well especially in contrast to the grammatical formidability of Arabic as an acquired language for the conquered peoples of the Islamic empire.¹⁶

Many in the Iranian lands—the people of the Persianate world (as Marshall Hodgson would define the domain of Persian culture)—came to make notable contributions to what is often defined as the “Islamic civilization” and most remarkably in Arabic language and literature.¹⁷ Elements of philosophical skepticism, Zurvanite fatalism, and Sufi stoicism can best be seen in Persian poetry from Khayyam to Hafez. Subtle reminders of a Persian identity moreover are evident in expressions of hedonistic love, homosexuality, and wine. What may be called a virtual poetic space offered a suitable environment for the survival and thriving of an alternative identity. Here the climate of the tavern (*may-khaneh*) often run by Zoroastrian, Christian, or Jewish proprietors, the brothels (*kharabat*) and nocturnal gatherings of musicians (*motreb*), singers, and dancers allowed lowly members of society with shady backgrounds defined as *rend* to mingle with the educated and the powerful. The poetic spaces offered a relatively safe haven for antinomian Persian identity to reclaim the past often nostalgically.¹⁸ Hafez's ode (*ghazal*) recalling the now-lost camaraderie in his homeland Fars is but one example:

Friendship I no longer see, what befallen to the friends?
 When did companionship come to an end, what happened to the companions? . . .
 This was the city of friends (*shahr-e yaran*) and the land of the sun priests
 (*mehr-banan*),
 When worshiping of sun (*mehrbani*) was abandoned, where did those ruling princes
 (*shahriyaran*) go?
 Not a single gem for years came out of the mine of brotherhood,
 What happened to the sunray, to the works of the wind and the rain . . . ?
 Quiet Hafez! Who knows the secrets of the divine?
 Of whom are you asking what happened to the cycle of the Time?¹⁹

In this masterful *ghazal* Hafez seems to be lamenting the tragic fall of his beloved patron, Abu Eshaq, the prince ruler of the house of Inju. In AH 758/1357, a violent client of the Mongol Ilkhanids murdered him and brought his house to an end. The wordplay here between the “city of friends” and the “prince rulers” may well be taken as a reminder of how in Hafez’s view the Persian camaraderie, specifically that of the Fars province, was tied to the institution of the state; in this case to a princely house that was indigenous to Fars.

Mention of the “fire priests” (*mehr-banan*) and the ritual of “sun worship” (*mehr-bani*) moreover should be taken as the poet’s reference to the Zoroastrian pre-Islamic past; a fire that was extinguished in Fars with the collapse of the Sasanian Empire. Hafez laments that the vitalizing ray of the sun, symbolically the Zoroastrian sun rites of the past, for long has not nurtured a gem of a hero in the “mine of brotherhood” (*kan-e morovvat*); a notion that may be taken as communal or even national solidarity. The passage of the Time and its historical cycles, he admits, is a divine mystery that cannot be fathomed by the mortals. Other *ghazals* confirms his wonder with the historical megacycles of which only remains and memories survive.

A whole body in Persian moral tales and treatises in ethics, “mirror” literature, as well stories of the prophets and books of ascension of the Prophet (*me’raj-nameh*) further confirm a linguistic awareness of a Persian identity. A solid tradition of historiography too from the eleventh-century Abul-Fazl Bayhaqi and as late as the court chronicles of the Qajar era were instrumental in making Persian accessible to the literati and the elites. Persian never seriously attempted to compete with Arabic as a language of Islamic law and theology. To a lesser extent it delved into other areas of Islamic sciences and philosophy. Distance from formal sciences instead allowed Persian to preserve and articulate unique features notably in epic and lyrical poetry, Sufi aphorisms, and popular storytelling.

Even Persian authors, whose chief scholarly productions were in Arabic, expressed themselves with a cultural ease evidently unencumbered with strictures of normative Islam or Arabic linguistic boundaries. This subtext of Persian identity and the place of the vernacular culture are often missed—at times conveniently—by the text-orientated field of Arabic-Islamic studies. A whole host of studies on Ibn Sina, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, Abu Rayhan Biruni, and even Nasir al-Din Tursi testifies to such embarrassing omission of historical context. Ibn Sina’s Persian works, such as *Danesh-nameh-ye Ala’i*, clearly negotiate between Persian and Arabic with some ease. Biruni’s Arabic *Athar al-Baqiya fi Qurun al-Khaliya*, a work about the remains of ancient times, reveals an almost nostalgic engagement with the Persian

past. His *al-Tafhim fi Awa'il al-Sana'at al-Tanjim*, a work on the history of astrology, also reflects similar sentiment. Both books were rendered in Arabic as well in Persian. Abu-Hamid Mohammad Ghazzali's Persian *Kimiya-ye Sa'adat* also offers a Persian perspective. Though it is comparable to his monumental *Ihya al-'Ulum al-Din* in Arabic, the former betrays something of Ghazzali's indigenous Iranian culture despite many years of crafting a procaliphate Sunni ideology in Baghdad and Damascus. Even his resort to Sufism and rejection of philosophical discourse signaled a return to his Khurasan origins. His correspondence in Persian reveals even better the Iranian side of this conservative scholar of Tus especially as he articulates a strictly normative theology against the challenge of Isma'ilis of the Alamut.

Equally intriguing is the case of those who were in denial of their Iranian origin even though it is hard to believe they could have remained unaware or untouched by it through their Persian familial, urban, or regional cultures. The great ninth-century historian Muhammad Jarir Tabari, an Arabo-Persian native of Amul in Tabarestan near the Caspian coast, is but one example. Claiming him for a broader Arabo-Islamic world, the scholarship on Tabari often tends to dismiss his childhood and his familial links to his birthplace. Like Biruni, Tabari's extensive coverage of Iran's pre-Islamic dynastic history, an important early Islamic source, reveals engagement with the Iranian past.

Ibn Qutayba Dinavari, another ninth-century scholar of Persian descent from the Persian-speaking city of Marv, is a more complex case. He spent much of his time as a judge in Western Iran but came to promote strong anti-Persian positions in the Shu'ubiyya debate in favor of a universal Arabic-Islamic identity. Yet even Ibn Qutayba's rejection of Persian identity did not stop him from acknowledging the civilizational heritage of the Persian pre-Islamic past and its influence in the Islamic cultural environment. The denial itself, from a sociological perspective, points at a desire to break from Persian particularism at a time when the institution of the caliphate was facing ideological and political challenges in the Iranian world as well as in the heart of the Abbasid Empire.

The Shu'ubiyya debate aside, it is important to note that Iranian learned classes embraced Arabic language, literature, and even culture of the Arabian Peninsula with a certain confidence and equanimity. Persian language quickly enriched its vocabulary corpus and incorporated Arabic verses and proverbs into Persian texts. They adopted the Arabic poetic meters and techniques and often improved on them. Stories and proverbs in Arabic, especially Bedouin pre-Islamic Arabia, along with the rich poetic tradition of the pre-Islamic era, were much appreciated. Arab legendary figures among them No'man ibn Mondar for his valor, Hatam of Tayy for his generosity and a whole host of Islamic figures for their chivalry and sacrifice are hailed in Persian poetry and prose. Such idealization of course lived side by side with negative images of the Bedouins as uncouth, ignorant, and thieves. These stereotypes were confirmed repeatedly in the course of the annual Hajj. The duality of the Arab image needless to say reflected a duality in the emerging boundaries of a cultural Iran as it distanced itself from the dominant language of the Muslim world.

With time the Iranian cultural sphere, some call it Persophonia, which was predominately Persian in its lingua franca and worldview, stretched from Anatolia through the Iranian plateau to the greater Khurasan and Transoxania (southern ridges of Central Asia) and through the Indian subcontinent.²⁰ For more than seven centuries from the Ilkhanid era up to the turn of the nineteenth century, Persian

thrived in South Asia as a language of the state, and in Iran proper and Central Asia as the language of the street. In the Indian subcontinent the Mughal court and administration, and later the princely states, promoted and patronized Persian as a language of the ruling elite. Yet through the Sufi circles its domain went beyond the court. In the early eighteenth century, for instance, the translation of the Upanishads into Persian as *Serr-e Akbar* by the learned prince Darashokuh was a milestone in Hindu-Muslim cultural dialogue. Darashokuh's translation, and a few of his other works and works of others in his circle, was produced in the Sufi milieu with clear Persian philosophical and even antinomian features.

On a different but related development in the middle of the eighteenth century the revivalist Indian theologian and Sufi scholar Shah Waliullah Dehlavi produced nearly all his major literary and theological works in Persian—as did a number of historians and poets of the period from Kashmir to Bengal and down to Deccan. An unmistakable Indo-Persian flavor subdued his otherwise stringent moral message. Even in the aftermath of the 1857 Indian Revolt when the British colonial authorities finally opted for total abolishing of Persian in favor of English as the lingua franca of colonial India, Persian as a favored medium preserved its place among the Indian literati despite deliberate measures to undermine the indigenous Indo-Persian culture of India.

Persophonia, as it is referred to by some scholars, however never was, and perhaps could not have been, synonymous with Iranian identity even in its amorphous premodern world of fluid identities. Many can be identified as Persianates who shared Persian language or memories from a common cultural repository. Yet it goes without saying that textual Persian of the high culture in India and Anatolia barely corresponded to the vernacular Persian in territorial Iran or in Dari-speaking Afghanistan. And all the more because of what Iran began to experience from the beginning of the sixteenth century. Notions of Persian kingship, poetics, and literary appreciation, even Iranian myths and legends prompted diverse emotions and claimed contesting loyalties among the Persianate peoples. Just to give one example, the Turanids of the *Shahnameh*, the arch nemesis of the Iranians, were seen by the people of Transoxania as a mythical ancestry of their Turkic stock, and hence a source of pride in contrast to the Iranian memory.

Prolonged conflicts between the Uzbeks and the Safavids since the sixteenth century further aggravated the Sunni Uzbeks' animosity toward the Iranian "Other." Increasingly Iran was associated in the Sunni eye with the Safavid movement and its propagation of the Shi'i heresy. Likewise, the Ottomans' greater awareness of their Turkic ancestry, and pride in their Turkish blood, helped to further distance the Ottomans from their Safavid neighbors on the account of not only religion and language but contested memories. Barely however did such sentiments diminish appreciation for works of Persian literature and their appropriation into early Ottoman canon.

CONTESTED NOTIONS OF IRAN

There is ample evidence in the Persian classical sources, both the literary works and the "mirror" literature (*andarz*, *nasihat-nameh*), confirming an awareness of Iran and *Iranzamin* (the land of Iran) as a politico-cultural entity. The pre-Islamic legacy, especially the dynastic state and the kingship tradition is well evident despite

enormous geographical disparity and persistence of local, familial, urban, tribal, and provincial loyalties. We can locate a territorial identity not only in the legendary past but also in the praise of *Iranzamin* of the Sasanian period. It is best evident in the *Shahnameh's* mythical division between Iran and Turan—but that is not all.

Even the pre-Zoroastrian worldview, as reflected for instance in the story of Faridun differentiates the Self and the Other along ethno-territorial lines that divides *Iran* from *aniran* (non-Iranians). In Zoroastrian texts, and with a remarkable resonance later in Shi'i Islam, such differentiation carried important political implications. In the cosmic struggle between the forces of the good originated supporting the God of Wisdom (*Abura-mazda*) and the forces of Evil (*Abriman*), the Iranians are naturally perceived as being on the side of the good. That meant that they had to be constantly on guard against impurities and evil pollutants that originate from the *aniran*. If left unchallenged, these alien forces were to prevail either by violent means or through deception corrupting the believers' communal and individual bodies.

Etymologically, the very idea of *Iran* as the land of Aryans, it was argued, meant something as benign as “we, the kin” or “we, the cousins.” This implied kinship camaraderie based on ethnic purity and citizenry of Iran. It is not a mere coincidence, therefore, that not only in Zoroastrianism but in Shi'i Islam the notions of ritual purity versus bodily pollutants occupy a prominent place. Differentiation operated in the legal theory and practice not only in reference to things, plants, animals, and human activities but also in differencing between the believers and nonbelievers. Ritual “impurities” (*nejasat*) categorically embraced, and still does, all nonbelievers within and outside the pale of Shi'i community. In works of Shi'i jurisprudence the dichotomy of clean and polluted occupies a prominent place and to be seen as the most fundamental marker of Shi'i self-identification.

It may be argued moreover that encounters with other peoples and cultures, often through nomadic invasions, further helped reassert Iranian sense of Self albeit as a vanquished elite. Disparaging labels applied to people of the Iranian stock at times reaffirmed their ethno-cultural identity. This was particularly true in the case of the Iranian “clients” (*mawali*) of the prevailing Arab overlords of the Umayyad times or the Persian-speaking officeholders versus the Turkish-speaking Qezelbash in the Safavid era. They at times internalized inferiority and turned it into a rallying point to regain their lost privileges.

The ancient Greek term *barbaroi* (indistinct or those who babble, i.e., non-speakers of Greek) came to be predominantly applied to the Persians of the Achaemenid times to register the Greek's sense of superiority presumably through mockery. *Barbarian* as a pejorative term thus may be seen as a propaganda strategy when people of Greek city-states encountered an imperial Persian threat superior to their own. More to the point, in modern times the term found resonance with the Europeans. Though seldom spelled out, the Greek classical reference served as a subtext to discourse of Orientalism as a justifying ground for Europeans hegemony. Like nearly all peoples of the non-West, the Iranians too were seen as “uncivilized” if not “barbarian” by the standards narrative of Western supremacy.

Remarkably, the Arab conquerors of the early Islamic era expressed the same linguistic condescension. They branded their Persian subordinate clients, the *mawali*, as *'Ajam* from the verb *'ajama*, denoting “he who speaks indistinctly,” in other words, “he who mumbles.” This too presumably was a mockery of Persians

inability to pronounce deep-glottal Arabic vowels. Yet unlike the Greek term, the Arabic *'ajam* survived not only as a pejorative term of reference but also as a Persian term of ethnolinguistic self-identification. As *'ajam* gradually lost its pejorative connotation, mostly after eleventh century, the term employed by Iranians in reference to their own ethnicity often in contradistinction with Iran's neighboring Arabic-speaking peoples. Even as a geographical term of the Abbasid period, *'Iraq-e 'Ajam*, the northwestern provinces of the Iranian plateau east of Zagros, denoted an Iraq of the Persians that was other than the Arabic-speaking Iraq.²¹

Adding to the complexity, since the coming of the Saljuq (Seljuk) Turks to the Iranian plateau in the eleventh century, yet another ethnolinguistic marker was branded on the indigenous peoples of Iran. Here the Turkic conquerors of Central Asia, who identified themselves as *Turks* came to refer to the Iranians—and especially to those in their administrative service—as *Tajik*, a term with an interesting etymological story of its own. *Tazhik* or *Tazik* having been applied in the Sasanian times to the tribes of northern Arabia, in modern Persian of the Islamic period was modified to *Tazi*, as for instance in the *Shahnameh*. It hence carried a subtle pejorative connotation in reference to all people of the Arabian Peninsula and implying the incursion of the marauding nomads upon sedentary population. The Persian compound verb *takht va taz* (raiding, sortie) connoted such ethnic characteristics. That the term later, as late as the sixteenth century, came to signify the indigenous Iranian element in the Safavid administration, versus the Turkmen Qezelbash military elite, implied that Iranians as *Tajiks* were seen as aliens in their own land.²²

Persian, however, did not develop a rich vocabulary to identify aliens. Besides *aniran* in the *Shahnameh*, which remained in the realm of legends, other terms were more general and relatively recent. The word *biganeh* (alien, stranger), for instance, does not connote any specific sense of territorial or ethnic otherness. It is the opposite of *yeganeh* (integrated, unified; etymologically from the word *yak* [one]) and could be used in any context ranging from the divine attribute, to a rival in love, to one unwelcome in the community. Similarly, the term *khareji* (outsider) is used more recently in reference largely to Westerners and is almost synonymous with *Farangi*, the older term for Europeans. The negative connotation of *khareji* (outsider; foreign)—rooted in the religious notion of the “one who is outside the Islamic creed” (*kharej az mazhab*)—was almost lost in the twentieth century, as it became an official term, similar to *biganeh*, to identify foreign citizens. Likewise, religious otherness was not highly developed, at least in reference to the external Other. In addition to common Islamic terms such as *infidel* (*kafir*) and accepted religious minorities (*ahl-e dhimma*), Shi'ism identified the Sunnis as *Nasebis* (i.e., those who stood up against the righteous creed; plural *nawasib*). The corresponding Sunni pejorative for Shi'is was *Rafidi/Rafezi* (the rejected; the apostate). All such terms were often complemented by negative attributes such as the “damned” (*mal'un*) and, more often, “polluted” (*najjes*), whereas the creed of the internal apostate was labeled as “straying” (*dalla/zalleh*), as for instance in reference to the Babi-Baha'i creed. Absence of a large vocabulary, however, can be seen as an indication of cultural inclusiveness once the boundaries of Islam and its sectarian divisions were safely crossed. In premodern Iran, the state-imposed identity was not therefore concerned as much with ethnicity, language, and even creed as with the subjects' loyalty to the authority of the sovereign.

SHI'Ī IDENTITY UNDER THE SAFAVIDS

Iranian communal identity nevertheless received a major boost in the Safavid era. As Shi'ism was declared the state creed and forcibly imposed on the majority population, a new layer of sociocultural identity began to take shape. Grounded in the Shi'ī legitimacy claim to political power, its martyrdom narrative, and its messianic aspirations, Shi'ism became a chief marker of Iranian identity within the geographical boundaries of the Guarded Domains of Iran (*Mamalek-e Mabrusa-ye Iran*), as Safavid Empire came to be known. Despite a vast ethnic and linguistic diversity within the Safavid territories, the state-sponsored Shi'ī creed with a Persian rendering, but also an Arabic theological veneer, proved to be remarkably enduring. Not even persistence of nonnormative and nonconformist religious currents, such as the rustic religion of Ahl-e Haqq among the Kurds of Western Iran or the remnants of Sunnism in the Iranian periphery, could seriously dent the ascendancy of Shi'ism.

The idea of “guarding” as the state's most vital duty rooted in its imperial function of defending the sacred realm of the pure from the real or imagined external threats and internal sedition. It was keenly tied to the notion of preserving the “good religion” as represented by the clerical establishment and upholders of conservative orthodoxy. Articulated as early as in the Sasanian era to police public conformity and to eradicate religious dissent and diversity, by extension, the state-religion symbiosis served to homogenize the subjects and stamp on them a notion of subordination to the state. Interdependence of the state with the religious establishment persisted through the Islamic period but was fully replicated only under the Safavid state with the support of an Arabo-Persian clerical establishment that it helped nurture and patronize.²³

Forced imposition of the Shi'ī shari'ah predictably met with a degree of resistance from the diverse population of the newly established empire. Though in theory the state demanded the subjects to comply with its prescribed interpretation of Shi'ism, in practice it was hardly in a position to impose close surveillance of “deviant” behaviors. The means of control in the pre-twentieth-century state simply were not efficient to keep a close watch over people except by means of selective coercion of the nonconformists or by means of anti-Sunni propaganda. Yet both these means were employed with success by the Safavid state toward the goal of Shi'atization of Iran. Complemented by the growing clerical influence beyond the sphere of the state, by the nineteenth century conversion was profound enough to turn Iran into a predominantly Shi'ī society.²⁴

Demonizing Sunnism and the Sunnis came at an enormous cost. The two-front Safavid Empire had to resist not only the military might of the Ottoman Empire but the destructive sorties of the Uzbeks and later Afghans in the east. Too often that meant loss of territory and loss of lives in the battlefield and massacre of the civilians. The bloody history of these conflicts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is now almost forgotten. Yet the deep impact on the Safavid society was more than military. One may trace in such hostilities the origins of Shi'ī isolation and its legalistic particularism. Despite porous frontiers that allowed exchange of goods and ideas with the neighboring lands and many contacts with Europe, the Safavid isolation weakened its material foundation albeit it consolidated its sense of Shi'ī identity. Had it not been for Shi'ism, the Ottoman war machine most likely would have devoured at least the Western provinces of the Iranian world in

the same fashion that it vanquished the Mamluks in Syria and Egypt and annexed their territories. We may only recall the resistance of the Shi'i population of Tabriz in the face of enormous Ottoman campaigns under Solayman and his successors. Even after decades of Ottoman occupation of Western Iran, the Shi'i loyalties of the local populace barely subsided. Yet cultural isolation of the Safavid elite is well manifest in perceptions of the Europeans and the complacency that sets in by the late seventeenth century.²⁵

The trauma of the Safavid collapse in 1722 and the ensuing civil wars and political instability throughout the eighteenth century triggered a crisis of legitimacy. With it came new reflections on Iranian identity. Encounter with invading Sunni Ghelzai Afghans, and soon the occupation of vast portions of the country by Ottoman and Russian armies, shook the Shi'i-centric Iran. No less shocking was the regicide of Shah Sultan Husain, the first of an Iranian ruler by a foreign invader after many centuries. The impact is well evident for instance in the poetry of Hazin Lahiji, who serenaded from the exile of India a voice of despair about his ruined country. Even restoration of the Persian Empire under Nadir Shah (1736–47) and his arduous and bloody campaigns to reconstitute the Safavid territory did not restore long-term stability. His failed effort to reconcile Shi'ism with Sunni orthodox Islam of the four recognized schools did not restore confidence either. On the contrary it showed how deeply Shi'ism had ingrained in the Iranian collective psyche.

The memoirs of Mohammad Khan Kalantar, the mayor of Shiraz covering six decades between the fall of the Safavids and the rise of Aqa Mohammad Khan Qajar (1785–1797), exhibits insecurity of life and property under Nadir's tyranny. A cultured man with a sense of humor and scathing tongue, he had no compunction showering scorns on Nadir and his lieutenants, and on an assortment of tribal warlords who periodically plundered his beloved Shiraz. Even though a sense of regional identity is palpable under Kalantar's account, he had little illusion about return of enduring peace and prosperity even under the Zands. By the 1780s and a renewal of a political turmoil, he is so vexed with the calamities to even call on Catherine the Great of Russia to relieve Iran of its misery. Yet for Kalantar, the absence of political stability does not translate into a loss of his cultural identity. He is indeed more Persian than anyone conceivable at the height of the Safavid Empire having been able to sublimate his despairs and miseries into a story of endurance shared by the people of his city and province.²⁶

EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY UNDER THE QAJARS

The dawn of the Qajar Dynasty was no more promising, at least not before the end of the eighteenth century. Yet Aqa Mohammad Khan, despite the terrifying image that he projected, was crucial in restoring a long-lost stability to the country. He essentially was a tribal warlord with prime loyalty to his tribe and desire for its political survival. Yet he was clearly emulating both Nadir Shah and Karim Khan Zand (1750–79) in trying to reconstitute territorial Iran of the Safavid times. To be sure he was eager to establish a royal house with the *Shahnameh* as its ideal model even though he barely aspired to the conduct of its legendary kings. He even created a Kayanid crown presumably inspired by the *Shahnameh*.²⁷

Traces of the Iranian awareness are even more visible under Fath 'Ali Shah Qajar (1797–1835). Like his uncle and predecessor, the future Fath 'Ali Shah spent his early years as ransom in the Zand court in Shiraz. This had an undeniable impact on his personality, his refined taste, and his self-image as an Iranian ruler with the adopted title of the “King of Kings” (*shahanshah*). The near total transfer to the Qajar service of the Zand *divan* nobility, itself a remnant of the Safavid era, further boosted the Perso-centric focus of the Tehran court and its political culture. Serving in high offices in Tehran as well as in provincial capitals of Tabriz, Shiraz, Kermanshah, and elsewhere the Persian officials channeled the patronage of Fath 'Ali Shah toward greater appreciation of the Persian culture and language. Even more Persianization was in effect in the provincial courts and among the princely class of that time.

Regard for cultural patronage is well evident in the creation of a royal society known as Anjoman-e Khaqan. The distinguished literati of this royal circle in Tehran and Tabriz launched a conscious literary “return” (*bazgasht*) to the Persian classical style of Khurasan of the tenth and eleventh centuries. More accurately a literary renaissance, it strived to break away from the complex poetic style of the Safavid era and its technical acrobatics. The focal point no doubt was a reconstituted cultural Iran. The *Shahanshah-nameh* of the poet laureate Fath 'Ali Khan Saba Kashani, mimicking the style of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, should perhaps be seen as the apogee of this literary movement both in poetic skills and in imagery. Yet it also provided a telling example of anachronistic and, as it turned out, misplaced glorification of Fath 'Ali Shah on the model of ancient legends.²⁸

Production of a body of historical works further placed the new dynasty on a longer trail of the Iranian past. Some histories traced back the Qajar claim to power to the end of the Safavid era and as their rightful heirs hence portraying the Afsharids and the Zands as usurpers. Others traced the Qajars to a Turko-Mongolian origin and therefrom, curiously, to pre-Islamic Iran. As late as the last decades of the nineteenth century Mohammad Hasan Khan E'temad al-Saltaneh, the official chronicler of the Naser al-Din Shah era, traced the Qajar origins to no later than the Parthian Dynasty of the second century BCE. Authors of universal histories on the classical model located the new dynasty in the *longue durée* of Persian kingship. Still other chroniclers recorded the events of their time with some accuracy even though mostly with embarrassing distortions in favor of their Qajar patrons. The thrust of the Qajar historiography thus was to recreate a grand narrative in which the ruling dynasty no longer was to be overshadowed by the Safavid past. Rather, it was to be depicted as a crucial force for the political stability and coherence of the country. Homage to the Shi'i religious past nevertheless was fully acknowledged. Such works as the multivolume *Nasekh al-Tawarikh* by Mohammad Taqi Lisan al-Molk Kashani with the penname Sepehr was commissioned by Naser al-Din Shah with the specific wish of producing a definitive history of the early Islam and the formative age of Shi'ism. They were also aimed at eloquence and accessibility. Though incomplete, the success of Sepehr's history can be gauged through its many printed editions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁹

Qajar projection of imperial authority employed with some success not only the epic literature of Iran and patronage of historical writings but pomp and circumstance. The dazzling appearance, large-scale portraits, and even rock reliefs of the shah as well as elaborate protocol and etiquette were typical of the Qajar court.

Beyond Fath 'Ali Shah's vanity, such display of royal glory were meant to generate a sense of continuity even beyond the Safavid times. Yet revival of ancient symbols and memories, though they allowed a fleeting sense of splendor and political confidence, proved to be badly inadequate in the face of European expansionism that soon appeared on the Iranian horizon. Defeat in two rounds of war with Russia in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and loss of coveted Caucasian provinces was a rude intrusion into an otherwise slow reconstruction of the Qajar Guarded Domains.

The impact of the wars with Russia went beyond damaging the image of the Qajar Dynasty as capable defender of the country and the faith. Later on the two botched confrontations in 1838 and 1856 with imperial Britain over Iran's territorial claim on Herat province reaffirmed Iran's military disparity. Defeat in the hands of Christian powers, was the first in Iran's long history, perhaps since the Byzantine-Sasanian wars of the early seventh century CE. The territorial losses and their diplomatic and commercial consequences brought home a gloomy message of disempowerment not only to the elite but to the population at large. The senior Shi'i *mojtaheds*' call for jihad in defense of the homelands and its Shi'i rulers and against the Russian intruders disastrously failed. Adding to the climate of despair, an exchange of the population with Russia and arrival of many Shi'i Caucasian émigrés in place of the departing Armenian made the defeat more tangible for average Iranians.³⁰

Encounter with Christian missionaries further sharpened awareness among the clerical classes and the educated lay. A body of refutations in response to Christian polemics especially in the early part of the nineteenth century aimed to defend a threatened Islamic identity. This is well represented in the genre of "refutation of the padre" (*radd-e padri*) that first came to vogue in response to the polemics of Henry Martyn, the English Evangelical missionary who visited Iran from 1808 to 1809. In his debates with the *mojtahids* of Shiraz the Iranian critics of the jurists rather unfairly hailed Martyn as the winner.

Facing new challenges from Christian Europe and criticism at home, numerous authors from among Usuli jurists, Sufi scholars, Islamic philosophers, and lay writers produced polemical responses. These were in answer to such questions as the veracity of Mohammad's prophecy and Qur'an as his miracle. Long absent from the Shi'i theological discourse, their successful treatment at a critical juncture was a test of cultural confidence and rhetorical agility. The Iranian authors came out with mixed results. Some defenses raised doubts about the validity of arcane arguments and theological complacency. Others, including one by a renowned Usuli jurist, Mirza Abol-Qasem Qomi, and another by a Sufi scholar, Mohammad Reza Hamadani, opted for new strategies and explored novel explanations.

The posthumous publication of Martyn's Persian translation of the New Testament (with the aid of a Persian secret convert) and its wide distribution stirred new interests. This was a fresh translation and the first complete version of the New Testament in print. Published first in St. Petersburg and in Calcutta in 1815 and soon after in numerous editions in England, by the middle of the nineteenth century it was among the most widely distributed printed texts in Iran. The access to the New Testament, and later the entire Bible, opened a new window for the Persian reader to Christianity and especially to the story of Jesus. This posed a subtle contest to Islam's supremacy and offered alternative view of Christianity and prophecy.

The Christian missionaries however never posed a serious threat to Shi'i Iran even though they were more successful with the Jewish and Armenian communities.³¹

Greater popularization of the Shi'i culture in the Qajar era, sponsored by the court and elite as well as by the preachers and professional mourners, reinforced Iran's Shi'i identity. Wider spread of *ta'ziyeh* passion plays during the month of Moharram together with mourning processions and liturgical recitations of *rowzeh-khwani* dramatized the tragedies of Karbala. Lithographic publication of mourning literature—some illustrated—and multiple-panel paintings (*pardeh*)—as aids to itinerant storytellers further helped spread of Shi'ism as a deeply ingrained set of rites and rituals among the urban folks and villagers alike.

The state's sponsorship is best signified by the construction of the Takkiyeh-e Dawlat in the mid-1860s under Naser al-Din Shah. As a site for *ta'ziyeh* performance during Muharram, perhaps inspired by European opera houses, it housed under one massive semipermanent roof the shah and his harem, the Qajar elite, and the diplomatic corps, together with the ordinary folks of all classes including woman and children. This was a memorable event in Iran's religious calendar and was replicated on humbler scale all over the country. The actors were ordinary people of towns and villages and the urban notables, local nobility, and landlords often funded the event. The power of performance on the makeshift stages as much as the imagery of the painted panel scenes carried by itinerant dervishes were engrossing as much as they were terrifying. These were potent media, before the days of moving pictures, recorded disks, and radio broadcast, essential for instilling a sense of national identity.³²

The Babi movement and its messianic message of protest echoed this very dramatized world of ritualistic Shi'ism at the time of unsettling losses and defeats. A crisis of confidence arising from the conduct of the religious and the political establishments no doubt was crucial in the shaping of the Babi message of renewal. It was aggravated by greater frequency of pandemics, especially cholera, and increasing recurrence of famines in the middle decades of the century. These had deeper implications for the society's sense of community and its place in the world around it. As Iran became more incorporated into the world economy and diplomacy the contrasts in wealth and power became more pronounced. Subscribing to the Babi message of cyclical renewal promised a moral awakening away from the stagnant worldview of the Shi'i jurists and ineffectual Qajar rule. The endurance of the Babi, and later the Baha'i idea of moral renewal may be attributed to an ability to offer to some Iranians, especially among the marginalized and underprivileged, an optimistic space albeit clandestinely.³³

For majority Iranians, however, the Babi-Baha'i community soon turned into an unwanted Other—one that dared to question the very basis of Iran's Shi'i solidarity. As an enemy within they became targets of deep suspicion, sustained hostility, and campaigns of persecution even in the hand of ordinary people. It was as if the majority Shi'i population, itself largely defined by its persecution narrative, was in need of an internal enemy so as to reassert its identity boundaries. This was the way the Shi'i sense of Self could be reaffirmed in the face of potent foreign territorial, material and economic challenges. Politicization of anti-Baha'i accusations—that Baha'is were first puppets of tsarist imperialism then agents of British colonialism and finally tools of American and Zionist imperial ambitions—stemmed from the same sense of insecurity. It was especially fueled in the early twentieth century by

the clergy's loss of power and prestige. Yet when empowered under the Islamic Republic, the clergy's anti-Baha'i campaign, and its politicized fabrications, did not cease to exist. It is as if the regime and its many constituencies were eager to invent a nemesis to reassure their own troubled solidarity. Despite widespread hate campaigns, however, the popular appeal of anti-Baha'ism seems to be in decline, for it no longer serves as a marker of religious cohesion within a large sector of the Iranian society.³⁴

Perceptions of material decline and moral inertia continued to haunt Qajar society and become the chief preoccupation of its intelligentsia. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Persian literature of reform increasingly referred to "ruined Iran" (*Iran-e viran*) and sought a remedy for its ills in Western material culture and its military, administrative, technological, and political advances. Adopting modernity, the more appealing side of European enterprise, engaged Iranians as the Ottoman, Egyptian, and most reformists of the non-West as key to the national awakening (*bidari*). Mostly coming from the Qajar elite, dissident intellectuals, and later from the merchant class, they sought remedy not only in construction of railroad and new industries but in the rule of law (*qanun*), reorganization of the state, and especially modern education.

Similar to Young Ottomans and Central Asian and Tartary counterparts, Iranian freethinkers like Mirza Fath 'Ali Akhundzadeh in the Caucasus and Mirza Malkam Khan in Iran viewed language as key to this reawakening. They called for reform of the Arabic-Persian script, which they viewed with some degree of naivety as key to greater literacy and deliverance from yoke of superstitions. Along the same lines, even prior to debates over script reform, they experimented with writing of "pure" (*sareh*) Persian free from excessive foreign words. Reaction to accesses of Arabicized style of the Timurid and Safavid periods anticipated the rise of simplified Persian in the age of press and mass education. It also denoted prominence of language as the cornerstone of cultural differentiation. Yet simple style, with many terms borrowed from European languages, can be seen as regaining of a linguistic sovereignty free from Arabic and unbind by the conventional strictures of the court and madrasa cultures.³⁵

Material disadvantages aside, the Qajar society remained relatively confident in the realm of culture. Reawakening may have appeared necessary and unavoidable to a few, but for multitudes the traditional mores and practices were sanctified and unalterable. The patriarchal order engrained in the state and religious structures remained intact and with it all the male-dominated sociocultural values at the core of familial and personal Self. Yet despite appearances of a strict enforcement of patriarchy and policing of gender boundaries, empowered women were not entirely absent. Nor should their presence be overlooked in the identity discourse of the period. It may be argued that below the surface, a layer of female assertion was palpable often in the form of a matriarchal substructure. Within the Qajar households or among women of the clerical families, for instance, powerful women asserted their influence not only in family affairs but also in public life, the economy, and even politics.³⁶

The complexity of power relations in the Qajar households speaks plainly of the gender roles as signifiers of identity. Men were expected to behave manly, with superior authority toward female subordinates. Safeguard of their kernel of honor (*namus*) by means of careful segregation, covering and controlling, was meant to

check the subversive potentials that womenfolk were perceived to have possessed. Volumes of folk tales common in Indian, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish literature about women's power of deception and sexual infidelity—often exposed by speaking animals—reflect such male anxieties. Though the Iranian modernists were exposed through education, diplomacy, and travel to tangible aspects of Western culture, reflections on gender roles remained largely intact. Excessive praises of the beauty of the *Farangi* women nevertheless were common. Even among the few who were familiar with European freethinking, ideas of progress, positivism, and scientific method, the gender role did not significantly change.³⁷

Gender issue aside, through Naser al-Din Shah's royal tours and other diplomatic representations aboard, new state and national symbols were introduced while older symbols of the state were redefined or standardized. Iranian flags and insignias, for example, with a long history going back to Sasanian Iran, came closer to a standard design. The Lion and Sun (*shir o khorshid*) insignia as the Iranian royal emblem for long appeared in diverse permutations. By early Qajar era it received a new lease of life first as a royal decoration bestowed on foreign dignitaries and gradually as a standard symbol of the state on coins and military uniforms. Its appearance on the Iranian national flag—itself not standardized even by the end of the nineteenth century—displayed the redefining of old symbols for new functions. In the process, it gradually lost the allegory of a female sun rising behind a male lion: a symbolism that visualized a subtle gender inference. The female sun serving as a source of moral nourishment in the background seems to be supporting the male lion, often shown as seated in the Qajar portrayal.

National anthem, alien to the Iranian royal culture, had to be imported however via Dar al-Fonun French military music instructors and later in the course of Naser al-Din Shah's visit to Vienna. There the baffled Austrian host, who could not imagine a military parade in honor of the shah without an anthem, commissioned one for Persia by the famous composer Johann Strauss Jr., the "King of Waltz." Yet it was no earlier than the Constitutional Revolution that the first Persian anthem was composed with patriotic lyrics and popular appeal.

On the evolving Qajar landscape the Dar al-Fonun, Iran's only modern institution of higher education before the end of the century, also contributed to the discourse of identity by instilling a new element of national pride in the minds of its students. Many of them later to become influential in shaping of Constitutional and early Pahlavi Iran, these children of the privileged classes were educated with modern school textbooks, mostly translations from French and Austrian sources. They received instructions not only in exact sciences and military skills but in world geography and history. Beside European instructors, a small group of European-educated Iranians, among them the renowned Mirza Malkom Khan, also was instrumental in disseminating a proto-nationalist culture.

Jalal al-Din Mirza's *Nameh-ye Khosravan*, the first truly nationalist history textbook in Persian written in a "pure" style free from Arabic, was intended for Dar al-Fonun curriculum. It displayed clear tropes of nationalist mentality. He adopted a linear course for his coverage of Iranian history from mythological past to early modern times. Aside from the imaginary prehistoric dynasties, which he borrowed from neo-Zoroastrian texts, the rest of his account from legendary Kayanids to the historic Sasanian kings closely followed the *Shahnameh* narrative, with a degree of glorification. In contrast, he treated Islam as an invasive aberration in the Iranian

grand narrative. His portrayal of Islamic Iran as a progressively decaying era compared to distant past moreover anticipated the Iranian nationalist narrative of the Constitutional period and after.³⁸

The Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) tied together these disparate traits of identity into an integrated ideology of nationalism: a rarified notion of territorial Iran vis-à-vis its neighbors and the world at large. It made a greater differentiation between the Iranian nation and the Iranian state, and it fused the indigenous notions of dissent with Western-inspired notions of democracy and revolutionary nationalism. Call for patriotism and “love of the motherland” (*hobb-e vatan*) was emblematic of this collective sense of Iranian “nation” (*mellat*). This was a nation “awakened” from the slumber of “tyranny” (*estebdad*) and “ignorance” (*jahl*) in order to acquire a constitutional order (*mashruteh*) and benefit from the rule of law and popular representation. In its secularized messianic vision of nationalism, the sacred (*moqaddas*) locus of the nation, the National Consultative Assembly, established through blood and sacrifice was to defend the nation against its despotic detractors. In the civil war that broke out in the aftermath of the bombardment of the Majles and during the “minor tyranny” (1908–1909), the nationalist (*melli-yun*) and their *mojahedin* forces engaged in a nationwide “revolution” (*engelab*) that eventually routed the reactionaries and restored the Constitution. A blend of native dissent; socialist trends from the Caucasus; and European, mostly French, romantic nationalism fueled the vision of the Constitutional Iran.³⁹

NATIONALIST IDENTITY IN THE PAHLAVI ERA

Long before ideological nationalism takes root through encounter with world at large or with modern print culture and state symbols, it may be argued, Iran has developed a coherent notion of itself. This was an experience somewhat distinct from constructed nationalisms of the new nation-states. The latter often emerged during and after a colonial experience of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries almost by default or by force of circumstances. Majority of the nation-states in the postwar Middle East fitted the definition of “imagined communities” as advanced by Benedict Anderson. The Middle East itself being a geopolitical construct may also fit into the same category. Yet such an interpretation deserves serious revisions once applied to societies in the non-West with long mytho-historical memories and linguistic and literary continuity. Countries like Egypt, Iran, China, India, and Japan—despite political discontinuity, fragmentation, and ethnolinguistic divides—fell into a different category. They no doubt adopted integrated nationalism of Europe, be it romantic or authoritarian, yet they had deeper sense of themselves prior to modern communication and technologies.⁴⁰

Anderson and other critics of wholesale nationalism of course deservedly problematized the conventional narrative of an everlasting national identity. They questioned fixed notions grounded in an undisturbed historical process and raised doubts about the nineteenth century idea of unfolding national destinies. Often complemented by stereotypes of “national character,” a legacy of Western travel literature and Orientalist fixations, these essentialist constructs are no longer historically plausible. Questioning them no doubt helps us rethink such time-honored *a priories* as a homogenous nation, uninterrupted past, undivided loyalty to the state or an established religion, and all-embracing cultural stereotypes.

A critical view of the Iranian nationalism thus helps unfold the myth of historical continuity from Cyrus to Pahlavi as forged in the twentieth century. The motto of the Pahlavi propaganda machine, “God, the Shah, the Motherland,” also does not stand the test of time. Equally debatable is the idea of “Greater Iran” stretching from Transoxania to the Caucasus and from Mesopotamia to the Indian Ocean. Even the everlasting boundaries of a fixed Iran from Caspian to the Persian Gulf may be safely deconstructed. Extolment of the pre-Islamic past in particular meant to overcome the narrative of decline associated with the Islamic era, and especially the Qajar period. Archeological excavations and translation into Persian of European histories throw new lights on ancient Iran and brought greater accuracy disengaged from myths and legends. Yet it also allowed the Pahlavi state to employ an oversimplified version to buttress its own glory.

Along the same lines, a blind pride in Iranian exceptionalism and ethnic superiority in the interwar period and even in the post–Second World War prevailed no doubt under the influence of European totalitarian ideologies and Fascist advocacy of Aryan superiority. Embraced by the Iranian state first under Reza Shah and later by the ultraright parties of the postwar era, these trends acquired enduring popularity in Iran. Sometimes even divorced from their ideological origins, they came to capture popular imagination for decades to come—and arguably even up to the present. Even in premodern times such notions were not entirely missing as spelled out somewhat half-seriously in the proverb: “all talents are only with the Iranians” (*honar nazd-e Iranian ast o bas*). The patriotic motto “Without Iran may my body no longer be” (*cho Iran nabashad tan-e man mabad*) is an exaggerated variant on an original *Shahnameh* verse. To the same category belong such clichés as Persian hospitality and Iranian ingenuity.

Yet the Pahlavi sense of Iranian superiority was essentially a construct forged against an Arab nemesis. It implied a sense of resentment not only toward the seventh century Arab conquest and imposition of Islam as alien religion but toward the neighboring Arab countries of the region. No doubt it was fueled by boundary disputes with Iraq and suspicion toward the Wahhabis and their rabid anti-Shi'i tendencies. It was albeit oblivious of cultural, familial, and religious ties that for long tied Iran to its Arab neighbors in the Shi'i Iraq and the Persian Gulf, not to mention Arabian Peninsula and Lebanon. Even by the late 1930s the Shi'i shrine cities of Iraq held a large Persian “resident” (*mojaver*) population with distinct Persian characters.

Modern Iranian national identity (*hoviyat-e melli*), as evolved through the Pahlavi era, streamlined Iranian memories and experiences into a homogenized nationalist narrative. As it is often been noted, this was above all to bolster the Pahlavi legitimacy. It was at the expense of ignoring, at times deliberately suppressing, enormous range of ethnic diversities, historical discontinuities, competing views of identity, and geographical disconnects. Predictably, the Pahlavi cultural elite—a blend of landed nobility and the educated urban middle classes—glorified Iran's ancient past and its imperial supremacy to compensate for feelings of political and economic decline in recent times under the Qajar rule. Early Pahlavi nationalism moreover was a mirror image of the then-populist European ideologies. Glorification of the ancient past was the order of the day in Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain, and Atatürk's Turkey.⁴¹

Early Pahlavi nationalism, moreover, stressed prolonged sufferings in the hands of alien conquerors, often nomadic, as the root cause of material decline and moral decrepitude. It highlighted waves of Macedonian, Arab, Turk, Mongolian, and later Uzbek, Ottoman, and Afghan invasions. In what may be called a national narrative of victimization the “Iranian element” (*onsor-e Irani*) was naturally highlighted. Yet subordinating these alien, often inferior, cultures to Iranian superior ways, it was argued, the Iranian element invariably prevailed. Members of the secretarial class, the *divanis*, who were mostly the landed nobility, thus often were viewed as rendering an invaluable civilizing mission toward the otherwise uncouth intruders who were to be soon infused into the urbane Iranian culture. A long line of great ministers and officials—such as the Barmakides, Nezam al-Molk, Nasir al-Din Tusi, and Rashid al-Din Fazlollah—were seen as the force behind the Persianization process.⁴²

Beyond forging a nationalist narrative, other measures were at work in shaping of a conscious national ideology. Setting of boundaries stamped on the Iranians another marker of identity. Prolonged boundary disputes in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and British India, and later with new neighboring nation-states, came to an end in the early Pahlavi period. Yet delimitation of borders in due course divided up communities with distinct tribal or linguistic identities. One example of nationalist projects nurtured or superimposed by neighboring states is greater Kurdistan. Another is Iranian Azerbaijan versus the Republic of Azerbaijan (the former Aran). The defeat of the secessionist pro-Soviet Democratic Parties of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in 1946 and eventual reassertion of Iranian sovereignty nevertheless was not entirely because of geopolitical and ideological factors. Rather, the inability of these provincial nationalisms to sustain viable support among the populace demonstrated the overall appeal of historical Iran as an Iranian national citizenship.

Registering and documenting personal identities and issuing of passport further reinforced Iranian citizenship. These measures impinged on individuals a sense of belonging to a defined national space and a common destiny. Deliberate and at times ruthless, the policies of dismantling regional, tribal, and linguistic entities helped homogenize Iranian identity. Forced settlement of the migrating nomads, punitive action against marauding bandits, disciplining the peasants and local notables, subduing the clerical class and restricting its symbols of influence, and enforcing of a Westernized dress code, all had profound impact on mass national awareness. Likewise, the unification of the armed forces, conscription and mandatory military service, employment in an ever-expanding state bureaucracy, and above all standard school curricula at all levels enhanced sense of national belonging.⁴³

The founding of a national bank, issuance of national currency, and expansion of a network of telegraphic and telephone services, roads and railroad, even standardization of weights and measures helped overcome local resistances. In a surprisingly short span of time the centralizing Pahlavi state managed to remove major ethnic constraints and regional barriers. It also projected its might through songs, marches, school uniforms, sports activities, and Boy Scouts organizations. State propaganda further praised military service, promoted its cultural achievements, and elevated a set of positivistic values as key to moral and scientific advancements.

Confronting international realities of the post-Second World War, Iranian identity evolved beyond the state cultural policies and propaganda. The polarizing impact of the Cold War and Iran's bitter standoff with Britain and the United States

over oil nationalization and economic sovereignty in the 1940s and the early 1950s allowed the ordinary Iranians to sense in tangible way a shared national destiny. It was as if the “West,” a construct of enormous potency and allure, came to represent the ultimate Other, supplanting all earlier ghosts of the Iranian past. In the mind of many intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s the setbacks in the nationalization campaign, the collapse of Mohammad Mosaddeq’s government, and eradication of the Tudeh Party left an indelible aftertaste. They began to subscribe to the Western Other’s lasting attributes of conspiracy and exploitation, features that in the coming decades came to haunt Iranian imagination and culminate in the Great Satan of the Islamic Revolution.⁴⁴

The hostile image of the West was in sharp contrast to earlier adoration of Western civilization at least since the time of the Constitutional Revolution and advocacy of adopting its values. Generations of Iranians from all walks of life admired Western material culture and were fascinated by its achievements. In 1920 Hasan Taqizadeh, a major figure of the Constitutional and Pahlavi eras, boldly prescribed for his country’s ills a simple remedy: “Iran must absolutely become Westernized (*Farangi-ma’ab*) in exterior and interior and physically and spiritually.” This he argued must be done through “unconditional surrender and absolute submission to Europe and acquiring Western manners and customs, mores and upbringing, sciences, technologies, lifestyle, and everything else with no exemption (except for language).”⁴⁵ Though he later partially modified his views, he remained representative of a worldview that by and large endured at least up to the 1960s.

For a generation of intellectual dissidents of the 1960s and 1970s who were captivated with the discourse of Occidentosis (*gharbzadegi*, alternatively translated as “Westoxication” and “Plague of the West”), there was a different interpretation of the West. Most significantly, the cultural critic and author Jalal Al-e Ahmad saw in the West, like the Turanids of the *Shahnameh*, a mighty and cunning power that could lure and corrupt. Perhaps since the Safavid anti-Sunni discourse, Iranians never forged a potent and penetrating opponent as the “Western Plague.” Essentially an antidote to positivistic fascination of Europe in likes of Taqizadeh, Occidentosis went a step further by questioning the wholesale validity of Western modernity. The idea, needless to say, was inspired in earnest by discourse of alienation and crisis of identity in postwar Europe and hence in essence a modern preoccupation.

First introduced by the cultural nationalist and rationalist prophet Ahmad Kasravi in the early Pahlavi era, Occidentosis was later developed more soberly by Fakhr al-Din Shademan as a critique of the excesses of the state’s hurried Westernizing policies under Reza Shah and its adverse effects on the rhythm of the Iranian society. Later the countermodernist thinker Ahmad Fardid, an eccentric philosophy professor in Tehran University, appropriated the Occidentosis discourse. He coined the term *gharbzadegi* (Occidentosis) to define a deeply entrenched philhellenic trait in Islamic philosophy. Influenced by German idealism, and particularly by an intentional reading of Heidegger, Fardid held the view that the persistent philosophical trait was complicated by the uncritical reading of the Enlightenment and later the positivistic philosophy of the nineteenth century. This affliction, in effect, alienated non-Western societies and poisoned their cultures up to our time. The intellectuals’ blind veneration for the West, he argued, came at the cost of losing touch with moral sources of their own past and their own cultural identity.

Popularized by Al-e Ahmad, Occidentosis found resonance with generations of younger Iranians lost in the barren cultural landscape of the late Pahlavi era. Westernized identity, it was stressed, was an ailment contracted by, or more accurately superimposed on, non-Western peoples and cultures without their agency. The West, luring through means of technology and material glitter, enslaved the East to serve its economic and consumer interests. Occidentosis thus promoted a nativist vision of history that nostalgically located authenticity in an imagined Islamic “tradition” while attributing material and moral dislocation to Iran’s postconstitutional modernizing project. As a polemical essay, it was highly influential despite its numerous errors and misrepresentations and with an essentialist worldview that proved to be highly misleading. Nearly four decades later, it continues to nourish the current Islamic regime’s insatiable thirst for conspiracy.⁴⁶

SELF AND OTHER IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

With the coming of the Islamic Revolution, the readymade dichotomy of West versus the rest gained a new lease of life serving as a crucial component of the revolutionary ideology. In the rhetoric of the new regime, the authentic Iranian identity was only valid, and the Western plague only cured, when Iranians returned to the caring bosom of the “true Islam” (*Islam-e rastin*). Defying the “corrupting” influences of the West, the United States in particular was seen as a hegemon with demonic powers to deceive and detract. The “world-devouring” Great Satan nevertheless was seen powerless and ineffective, even desperate, in the face of “true” and “committed” Muslims. It was this seemingly uncompromising ideal that was to be installed in the hearts and minds of a new generation of Iranians. It was to cleanse the vices and impurities of secularism and alter the ways of the “idol-worshipping” (*taghuti*) elite of the Pahlavi era.⁴⁷

The righteous Self versus the wicked Other in the Islamic Revolution further relied on a martyrdom paradigm, especially invoked during a long and atrocious war with Iraq. Here waging “war in the fronts of truth against falsehood” sharpened the line between the “Islamic nation” (*ommat-e eslami*) and the global forces of arrogance (*estekbar*). In this encounter—in reality the first large-scale invasion that Iran experienced since the occupation of Azerbaijan in 1827—the Ba’athist regime in Iraq was only the “lesser demon,” a puppet in the hand of the Great Satan and its allies. Sacrifice and martyrdom were not merely to defend the “Islamic motherland” (*mihan-e Islami*), as Iran was referred to in the war propaganda. Nor was it only to preserve the nascent Islamic Revolution but to deliver the liberating message of the revolution beyond Iran’s to all the “disinherited” peoples of the world.

For thousands of volunteers, mostly the youth of high school and university age, and for many in the regular army and in the Revolutionary Guards corps, the war ingrained a new identity: one that portrayed them as liberators on a sacred mission. A protracted stalemate in the war, massive casualties and loss of life in the trenches, propaganda fatigue, and the ever-expanding war cemeteries took their toll. Despite Iran’s humiliating compliance with the ceasefire that put a bitter end to Khomeini’s messianic dream, the war had a transformative effect on its veterans and arguably on the Iranian society at large. The experience of political isolation and the singlehanded resistance against the enemy rekindled a sense of self-reliance that endured even the callous stubbornness of the leader of the Islamic Republic. It

is as if the majority of the Iranians chose to memorialize the trauma and tribulation of a ghastly war as reaffirmation of their national resolve.⁴⁸

In the postrevolutionary years and more so since 1989, the Iranian regime moved away from the rhetoric of blood and sacrifice. A populist brand of folk religiosity, a culture of ritualistic cleansing against a host of outside pollutants, instead found a new resonance. Cleansing was reinterpreted, albeit discretely, not merely a pious act of cleansing or segregation between “pure” believer and “polluted” non-believer. Rather, it became an element of ideological differentiation between “one of us” (*khodi*) and the rest of the society. In this worldview the Islamic nation could only be immune of “cultural invasion” (*tahajom-e farhangi*) if the committed ones (*motaahhed*) withstand infiltration of the “enemy.” To this end, the plurality of the Iranian society and culture was also seen to be inherently at odds with Islamic unanimity.⁴⁹

Ironically the Islamic Republic, as it evolved and consolidated its institutional base, remained largely loyal to the state-enforced, all-embracing project of national homogenization, at times with even greater vehemence than Pahlavi times. Even though the narrative of ancient glories was denied and the obsession with Achaemenid imperial power derided, the memory of that past barely faded. Likewise, all the rhetoric about cultural intrusion took shape, and still does, against a backdrop of increasing desire for borrowing and incorporating virtually all aspects of Western material culture from cyberspace and nuclear technology to fast food and consumerism.⁵⁰

The boundaries of a reconstructed Islamic identity thus were set on fragile ground whereby even the “committed” had to negotiate between ideological loyalties on the one hand and the luring realities of a rapidly globalizing world on the other. Despite the Islamic Republic’s systematic and prolong investment in re-Islamizing Iran through education and propaganda, it only partially, and with a diminishing rate, succeeded in transforming the Iranian perceptions of themselves. Even a cursory review of the contemporary popular culture demonstrates persistence of nationalist ideals and symbols. True, the postrevolutionary generations by and large are more attached than the Pahlavi era to such symbols and rituals as rites of pilgrimage to Mecca and Karbala, visitation of shrines, commemoration of Moharram, religious folk beliefs and practices, and an odious brand of folk religion promoted by the clergy or by professional “adulators” (*maddah*). Yet staunch supporters of the Islamic Republic aside (and those sectors who financially and otherwise benefit from the regime), there exists below the surface a defused but deep level of skepticism. Among a large sector of the urban middle classes—now more than 75 percent of population—exists an almost endemic defiance of ideological Islam. Among the intellectuals and educated public a vast majority seem to be questioning the very idea of Islam as prime building block of Iranian society.

According to the polls conducted by the Islamic Republic’s Ministry of Islamic Guidance published in 2001—more than two decades after the Islamic Revolution—a vast majority of the Iranians, as many as 86 percent, were highly proud or very proud of their national identity. This is among the highest in the Muslim world. And a large percentage, as many perhaps as a 25 percent, seem to confess to no particular religious denomination—a remarkable commentary on the reverse effects of Islamification in schools, in the media, and over the pulpit of the mosques.⁵¹

Yet domestically, state policies through media and government institutions helped undermine Iran's patchwork of ethnic and regional diversity in a perennial fear of secessionist ambitions. Alternative religious communities and alternative ethnicities were often glossed over, diluted, or suppressed by the center in favor of what may be called a generic Persian-based Islamo-Iranian identity.⁵² In a country with nearly 40 percent of the population speaking languages and local dialects other than Persian as their vernacular (with 24 percent speaking Azarbaijani Turkish and 9 percent Kurdish), expressions of local cultures and languages is badly underrepresented. Even a greater fear of diversity in Iran is visible when it comes to religious minorities or religious tendencies other than the brand promoted by the Islamic Republic. Chronic persecution of the Sufis and Sunnis, the latter about 10 percent of the total population, on grounds of their religious beliefs, has accelerated in recent years. In recent years the Baha'is became target of venomous attacks in the media and press and their leadership and community organizers were harassed and jailed. The political charges that were brought against them, devoid of a shred of truth, speak of deep-seated grudges and enmities.

Accusing Baha'is as agents of Zionism and enemies of Islam is doubtlessly driven by darker motives. Sheer grudge aside, the current regime needs an "enemy within" to define its Self and solidify its grassroots. The imagined Baha'i threat seemingly is not sufficient. To refine its identity the regime need other foes (the Freemasons, the Wahhabis) by which it demonizes the Sunnis: the Devil-Worshippers, the Sufis, the "pseudo-mystics," the Pahlavi royalists, the "Deviators" (*monafeqin*; a disparaging label for the Mojahedin Khalq—the "religious intellectuals" now in exile, and most recently the supporters of the "Sedition" (*fitneh*)—by which the 2009 Green protest movement is branded). If the Great Satan is the prime mover of a grand conspiracy against the Islamic Republic, in this paranoid scheme, the Baha'is and the host of other enemies are to be labeled, paraded, and punished as domestic puppets and agents of named or unnamed foreign powers and their secret services. Generated by the fertile imagination of the propaganda commissars of the regime, over the past decade conspiracy theories have reached a new level of delusion.

Yet the process of greater Islamic integration initiated by the state not always followed the intended consequences. The extensive internal migration (mostly from villages to cities but also across provincial lines), new electronic media, and communication from multichannel television and regional radios to Internet rapidly changed the face of the Iranian society. Further growth of higher education, including a vast number of private universities in remoter parts of the country, helped facilitate access to the outside world. With these changes came an unprecedented rekindle of the identity debate. The changing demographics, rising social mobility, women's not yet fully voiced but nevertheless potent demands for greater social presence and legal rights are serious challenges to the vision of a homogenized Islamic Iran (*Iran-e eslami*). At the outset of the revolution a set of ideals and slogans sufficed to attract the masses and secure their loyalty. For the maturing generations of Iranians now that message has turned into a fusion of patriarchy, misogyny, and tired slogans. They seem to be quickly losing their luster.

If we can speak of national character (in a cautious context of the post-Orientalist age), surely elements of skepticism are manifest in contemporary Iranian culture. Popularity of such revered icons as Hafez, Khayyam, and Ferdowsi is but one example. As many as the cultural institutions of the Islamic republic would like to present

them in an Islamic light, the national poets of Iran are revered not because of their adherence to conventions of organized religion but because they are building blocks of an independent cultural identity. Oddly enough, the experience of modernity not only confirmed such indigenous skepticism but added to its complexity.

Religious sympathies widespread among all sectors of the Iranian public are reconciled, not so happily perhaps, with a “Dionysian” aspect in their poetry, music, and revelry. This is best evident in popularity of Hafez’s lyrical poetry. His self-characterization as a *rend*—an antinomian and a skeptic who is coming from below and is prone to subversion, love and leisure, music, drinking, narcotics, and even crossing sexual boundaries—reserved its appeal. This is a far cry from the “hypocritical piety” of the judge-jurists, the morality police, the pious *zاهد*, and the trickster in the Sufi garb: figures that are frequently mocked in Hafez’s odes.

The question of identity in today’s climate begs attention because the Iranian society has articulated a self essentially distinct from the state and often in conflict with what prescribed by the state. The widening gap—even an identity war—is out in the open. Since summer of 2009 it is visible in the slogans and symbols of the Green Movement (*jonbesh-e sabz*) and its social composition. The evolving undercurrents of a new Iranian individuality, largely generational and urban, now demands political openness, greater gender and political freedoms, end to country’s isolation and a desire for global inclusion. The younger Iranians seem less motivated by dated conspiratorial rhetoric and more with a sincere search for their roots. The budding quest, at least among a sector of the Iranian youth, may not tragically end, as did in the legend of Sohrab. Perhaps a new quest is in progress, as in Sohrab Sepehri’s poem:

Tonight I must leave.
And go somewhere,
That has room only for the shirt of my loneliness.
Where trees of epics are in sight,
Toward that vast plane of wordlessness that forever calls on me.
Where are my shoes?
Tonight I must pick up that suitcase
Who called “Sohrab”?

The poet’s existential journey, like Sohrab of the legend, is one of self-discovery even though more individualistic in nature. And it is not bound by words, perhaps a reference to the cultural burden of sacred texts. He walks toward the trees of epics—a reference to the *Shahnameh*, perhaps—which are lying beyond the vast planes of his loneliness. Is this a journey of deliverance through the “Green Space” (*Hajm-e Sabz*) as the title of his poetry volume invites us to think—a quest perhaps for a utopian paradise (*pardis*) beyond the ancient divides of Iran and *aniran*?⁵³

NOTES

1. Abu al-Qasem Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, ed. J. Khalighi-Motlaq (Costa Mesa, CA, and New York: Mazda Publishers, 1990), 2:118–99. For English translation see *The Tragedy of Sohrab and Rostam*, trans. J. W. Clinton, rev. ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), and D. Davis’s excellent prose and verse translation, *The Lion and the Throne* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 1998), 209–36. In reading of Sohrab’s

- story as an identity quest, I was inspired by A. D. Smith's interpretation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* in his *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991; and Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1993), 1–4.
2. Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, 125 (all translations are mine).
 3. Ibid., 127. For Faridun's division of the world in the *Shahnameh* and origins of enmity between Iran and Turan, see A. Amanat, "Divided Patrimony, Tree of Royal Power, and Fruit of Vengeance: Political Paradigms and Iranian Self-Image in the Story of Faridun in the *Shahnameh*," in *Shahnameh Studies I*, ed. C. Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2006), 49–70. See also *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater (New York, Columbia University, 1981–) henceforth *EIr*: "Aneran" (Ph. Gignoux).
 4. Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh*, 171.
 5. Little general surveys are done on evolution of Iranian identity. For an excellent overview see A. Ashraf's entry in *EIr*: "Iranian Identity," parts 1, 3, and 4 and cited sources. See also *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (*EI2*): "Kawmiyya, iii. In Persia" (A. K. S. Lambton).
 6. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.
 7. For Iran's historical nomenclature, see G. Gnoli, *The Idea of Iran: An Essay on Its Origin* (Rome: ISMO, 1989), and his entry in *EIr*: "Iranian Identity: pre-Islamic period." A. S. Shahbazi, "The History of Idea of Iran," in *Birth of the Persian Empire*, ed. V. Sarkhosh-Curtis and S. Stewart (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 100–111, and Z. Sajjadi, "Nam-e Iran dar Nakhostin Asar-e Farsi," in *Namvareh-ye Doktor Mahmud Afshar*, ed. I. Afshar (Tehran: Bonyad Mawqufat-e Doctor Mahmud Afshar, 1986), 2:248–59.
 8. See *EIr*: Iran<0x161>ahr (D. N. MacKenzie) for historical occurrence. For the etymology of *shahr*, see M. H. ibn Khalaf Tabrizi, *Borhan-e Qate'*, ed. M. Mo'in (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1361/1982), 3:1314n9.
 9. M. Qazvini, ed., "Moqaddameh-ye Shahnameh-ye Abu Mansuri," *Bist Maqaleh*, vol. 2 (Tehran: 1313/1934). Also cited in M. A. Riyahi, *Sarcheshmeha-ye Ferdowsi-shenasi* (Tehran: 1372/1993), 175.
 10. For the continuity of Persian kingship model, see, for example, an excellent article by C. E. Bosworth, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran and the Search for Dynastic Connections with the Past," *Iran* 11 (1973): 51–62, and R. Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975), esp. chaps. 6, 8, and 10. See also R. Levy, "Persia and the Arabs," in *The Legacy of Persia*, ed. A. J. Arberry (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 60–88.
 11. Katib Chelebi's universal history (*Fadhlakat Aqwal al-Akhyar fi 'ilm al-Tarikh wa'l-Akhhbar* [*Fadhlakat al-Tawarikh*], Ms. Bayazit Library, dated 1052/1642,) stretches from ancient Persian kingship to the Ottoman Empire of his own time.
 12. For the persistence of Persian memory among the Shu'ubiyya, see, for example, H. Momtahn, *Nahzat-e Shu'ubiyyah dar Barabar-e Khelafat-e Omavi va 'Abbasi* (Tehran: 1354/1965), esp. chaps. 13–21, and Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Shu'ubiyyah Controversy and the Social History of Early Islamic Iran," *IJMES* 7 (1976): 161–82. See also H. A. R. Gibbs, "The Social Significance of the Shu'ubiya," in idem, *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 62–73, and J. Homa'i, *Shu'ubiyyah*, ed. M. Qosdi (Isfahan: 1363/1984).
 13. On *Zandaqa* heresies among the Shu'ubiyya see Momtahn, *Nahzat*, 225–64. For early nationalist views of early Iranian heresies, see G. H. Sadighi, *Les mouvements religieux iraniens au IIe et au IIIe siècle de l'hégire* (Paris, 1938); Persian translation by the author as *Jonbesha-ye Dini-e Irani dar Qarnha-ye Dovvom wa Sevvom-e Hejri* (Tehran: 1993); and Frye, *Golden Age*, 126–49. For similar manifestation of Iranian identity of humble origin, see S. M. Stern, "Ya'qub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiments," in *Iran*

- and Islam: A Volume in Memory of Vladimir Minorsky*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971) 535–56.
14. On the emergence of modern Persian, see G. Lazard, “The Rise of the New Persian Language,” *Cambridge History of Iran*, R. Frye ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 4:595–632; and G. M. Wickens, “Persian Literature and Affirmation of Identity,” in *Introduction to Islamic Civilization*, ed. R. M. Savory (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 71–78. For Shu’ubiyya literary awareness, see L. Richter-Bernburg, “Linguistic Shu’ubiya and Early Neo-Persian Prose,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 1 (1974): 55–64.
 15. For Judeo-Persian and other early Persian documents in non-Arabic scripts, see P. Khanlari, *Tarikh-e Zaban-e Farsi*, 3 vols., 6th ed. (Tehran: 1377/1998), 1:307–35 and cited sources.
 16. For treating Persian by the twentieth-century Iranian scholars as a vehicle for Iran’s high culture and its endurance in a literary tradition see for instance M. T. Bahar, *Sabk-shenasi ya Tarikh-e Tatavvor-e Nasr-e Farsi*, 6th ed. (Tehran: 1370/1991), vol. 1, esp. chaps. 4, 6, 8, and Z. Safa, *Tarikh-e Adabiyat dar Iran*, 12th ed. (Tehran: 1371/1992), 1:140–82.
 17. See for instance R. Hovannesian and G. Sabagh, eds. *The Persian Presence in Islamic World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), esp. E. Yarshater, “The Persian Presence in Islamic World,” 4–125, and cited sources.
 18. Little has been done on what may be defined as “poetic space” as the abode of antinomian thought in Persian literature. Surveys of Persian poetry of the post-Mongol era in particular, when antinomian trends abound, focus largely on literary form and technical details rather than the sociocultural context. My forthcoming study of heresy in the Iranian world intends to highlight poetry’s role in shaping an alternative culture beyond the accepted socioreligious norms.
 19. Hafez, *Divan*, ed. P. Khanlari, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 1362/1983), no. 164, 344.
 20. For Persophonía see B. Fragner, *Die “Persophonie”: Regionalität, Identität, und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens* (Halle an der Saale: n.p., 1999).
 21. See for instance *Elr*: “‘Ajam” (C. E. Bosworth). It is noteworthy that *Iraq* itself is a term of Sasanian origin presumably meaning “palm groves.”
 22. On evolution of *Tazhik* and *Tajik* since Ghaznavid era see Ashraf, *Elr*: “Iranian Identity, III” and M. Dabirsiyaqi, “Tat va Tajik” in *Namvareh-ye Doktor Mahmud Afshar*, ed. I. Afshar (Tehran, Bonyad-e Mawqafat-e Doktor Mahmud Afshar, 1370/1991), 6:3374–421.
 23. On the evolving notion of the Guarded Domain of Iran since Ilkhanid era, see D. Krawulsky, *Iran, Das Reich der Ilhane: Eine Topographisch-Historische Studie* (Weisbaden: Eisenbrauns Publishers, 1978); idem, *The Mongols Ilkhans and their Vizier Rashid al-Din* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang Publisher, 2011), esp. chap. 3; and *Elr*, Ashraf “Iranian Identity,” vol. 3 (Safavid period).
 24. For the Shi’i Arab *ulama* of Jabal ‘Amil and their interaction with the state and the Iranian population, see R. Jurdi Abisaab, *Converting Persia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), esp. chaps. 1–3. See also S. A. Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Changes in Shi’ite Iran from the Beginning to 1890* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), chaps. 4–8.
 25. See, for example, R. Matthee, “Between Aloofness and Fascination: Safavid views of the West,” *Iranian Studies* 31 (1998), 219–46, and idem. “Suspicion, Fear, and Admiration: Pre-Nineteenth-Century Iranian Views of the English and the Russians,” in *Iran and the Surrounding World: Interactions in Culture and Cultural Politics*, ed. R. Keddie and R. Matthee (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 121–45.
 26. Mirza Mohammad Kalantar, *Ruznameh*, ed. ‘A. Eqbal (Tehran: 1325/1946), and *Memoirs of Mirza Mohammad Kalantar* (Mayor of Fars). For Nader Shah’s notion of authority

- and legitimacy, see E. S. Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy of Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), esp. chaps. 2, 6–7, and cited sources.
27. For Aqa Mohammad Khan/Shah's perception of his rule and restoration of kingship, see A. Amanat, "The Kayanid Crown and the Qajar Reclaiming of the Royal Authority," *Iranian Studies*, no. 34, guest ed. L. Diba (2004): 17–30 and cited sources. See also G. Hambly, in *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 7:139–43. For his interest in the *Shahnameh*, see for instance "Azud al-Dawleh Sultan Ahmad Mirza Qajar," in *Tarikh-e 'Azodi*, ed. 'A. Nava'i (Tehran: n.p., 1355/1976). For Karim Khan Zand's perception of his rule see J. R. Perry, *Karim Khan Zand: A History of Iran, 1747–1779* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979) 214–22.
 28. For Fath-'Ali Shah's and revival of Persian kingship, see *EIr*: "Fath-'ali Sah Qajar" (Fath-'Ali Shah) by A. Amanat and idem, "The Kayanid Crown."
 29. For Qajar historiography see *EIr*: "Historiography, Qajar Period" (A. Amanat) and idem, "Legend, Legitimacy and Making of a National Narrative in the Historiography of the Qajar Iran (1785–1925)," in *History of Persian Literature*, vol. 10, gen. ed. E. Yarshater, as *Persian Historiography*, ed. C. Melville, chap. 7, 292–366 (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011).
 30. For the impact of the Russo-Persian wars see P. W. Avery, "An Enquiry into the Outbreak of the Second Russo-Persian War, 1826–28," in Bosworth, *Iran and Islam*, 17–45; A. Amanat, "Russian Intrusion into the Guarded Domain: Reflections of a Qajar Statesman on European Expansion," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993): 35–56; and R. Gleave, "Jihad and the Religious Legitimacy of the Early Qajar State," in *Religion and Society in Qajar Iran*, ed. R. Gleave (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 41–70. On the impact of the Herat Crisis and wars with Britain, see A. Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe: Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar and the Iranian Monarchy, 1831–96* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; paperback ed., London, I. B. Tauris, 2008), chaps. 6–7, and M. Volodorsky, "Persia's Foreign Policy between the Two Herat Crisis, 1831–56," *Middle East Studies* 21 (1985): 111–51.
 31. For Martyn's visit and his translation and polemical exchanges, see A. Amanat, "Mujtahids and Missionaries: Shi'i Responses to Christian Polemics in the Early Qajar Period," in Gleave, *Religion and Society*, 247–69, reprinted in A. Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 127–48. See also 'A. Ha'eri, *Nakhostin Royaruhiha-ye Andishegaran-e Iran ba Do-royeh-ye Tamaddon-e Gharb* (Tehran: 1380/1991), chaps. 11–12.
 32. For social significance of the rituals of Moharram in the Qajar era, see, for example, K. S. Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), chaps. 1–3, and W. Floor, *The History of Theater in Iran* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2005), chaps. 4–5. See also J. Calmard, "Moharram Ceremonies and Diplomacy," in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social, and Cultural Changes, 1800–1925*, ed. E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983) 213–28. For a recent interpretive analysis see H. Dabashi, *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), chap. 7.
 33. On the social context of the Babi Movement, see N. Keddie, "Religion and Irreligion in Early Iranian Nationalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 4 (1962): 265–95; A. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal: The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1844–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989; paperback ed. Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2005), esp. introduction and chaps. 2, 6–8, and D. M. MacEoin, *The Messiah of Shiraz: studies in Early and Middle Babism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), esp. 203–324. For a postmodernist treatment see N. Mottahedeh, *Representing the Unpresentable: Historical Images of National Reform from the Qajar to the Islamic Republic of Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), chaps. 3–4, and H. Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 181–224. On the emergence of the Baha'i community, see, for example, J. R. Cole,

- "Religious Dissidence and Urban Leadership: Baha'is in Qajar Shiraz and Tehran," *Iran* 73 (1999): 123–42, and for shaping of the Baha'i doctrine, see J. R. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Baha'i Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998). For later development of the Baha'i identity especially among religious minorities, see M. Amanat, *Jewish Identities in Iran: Resistance and Conversion to Islam and the Baha'i Faith* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011).
34. On the roots and manifestation of anti-Baha'i attitudes in Iran, see A. Amanat, "The Historical Roots of the Persecution of Babis and Baha'is in Iran"; H. E. Chehabi, "Anatomy of Prejudice: Reflections on Secular anti-Baha'ism in Iran"; M. Tavakoli-Targhi, "Anti-Baha'i and Islamism in Iran"; and R. Afshari, "The Discourse and Practice of Human Rights Violations of Iranian Baha'is in the Islamic Republic of Iran," in *The Baha'is of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies*, ed. D. P. Brookshow and S. B. Fazel (London: Routledge, 2008), 170–277.
 35. For an overtly critical treatment of the Qajar reformists, see H. Alger, *Mirza Malkum Khan* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: California University Press, 1973). For a corrective perspective see S. Bakhash, *Iran: Monarchy, Bureaucracy, and Reform under the Qajars, 1858–1896* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978), and G. Nashat, *The Origins of Modern Reform in Iran, 1870–80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). Admittedly the narrative of decline and reawakening in the reformist discourse awaits a serious treatment. For an overview of identity debate in the Qajar period see also J. R. Cole, "Marking Boundaries, Marking Time: The Iranian Past and the Construction of the Self by Qajar Thinkers," *Iranian Studies* 29 (1996), 35–56. See *EI*: "Iranian Identity: 19th and 20th Centuries" (by A. Ashraf).
 36. On gender roles and women in the Qajar period, see A. Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), and J. Afary, *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For Mahd-e 'Olya and Qajar matriarchy, see also Amanat, *Pivot of the Universe*, chaps. 2 and 4. For Qurrat al-'Ayn and her role in the Babi movement see Amanat, *Resurrection*, esp. chap. 7, and idem, *Qurrat al-'Ayn (Tabira): A Millennial Feminist, in Makers of the Muslim World* (Oxford: One World Publishing, 2012, forthcoming). On fascination with European women see M. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), chap. 4.
 37. One example is the case of Anis al-Dowleh. During Naser al-Din Shah's first European tour in 1873 one of his chief wives, Anis al-Dowleh—a women of character and intelligence—was in the retinue. In St. Petersburg when she was expected to follow the European practice of appearing in the company of her husband, neither the shah nor his reformist grand vizier, Mirza Husayn Khan Moshir al-Dowleh, were prepared to tolerate the breach of the Islamic norm of female segregation, let alone unveiling. Despite Anis al-Dowleh's expressed desire to appear publically and unveiled, she was forced overnight to return to Iran along with her female entourage. All-male royal tours remained the norm all through the Qajar and early Pahlavi eras. See *EI*: "Anis al-Dawla" (G. Nashat).
 38. See A. Amanat, "Pur-e Khaqan va Andisheh-ye Bazyabi-e Tarikh-e Melli-e Iran," *Iran Nameh* (1999): 17:5–54. See also *EI*, "Jalal al-Din Mirza" (A. Amanat and F. Vajdani). On the neo-Zoroastrian nationalism of the Safavid period and pure Persian style see M. Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*, esp. chap. 5–6.
 39. On the emergence of nationalist awareness in the Constitutional period, see, for example, Nazem al-Islam Kermani, *Tarikh-e Bidari-ye Iranian*, 2nd ed., ed. 'A. A. Sa'idi Sirjani (Tehran, Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, Bonyad-e Farhang-e Iran, 1346–49/1967–70), esp. part. 1, vol. 1 (and included clandestine publication of the period). See also *EI*: "Constitutional Revolution: Intellectual Background" (A. Amanat) and cited sources.

40. See B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983), esp. introduction and chap. 3. A close dialogue with Anderson's example is to be seen in Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran*. For a somewhat undue emphasis on the role of Orientalism in shaping of national identity, see M. Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity* (New York: Marlowe and Company, 1994).
41. For cultural polices of early Pahlavi Iran, see, for example, A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and State, 1870–1940* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), esp. chap. 2–4; T. Atabaki and E. Zucher, *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Ataturk and Reza Shah* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), chaps. 8–9.
42. On historiography and state patronage in the early Pahlavi period, see *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. T. Atabaki (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2009) esp. Tavakoli-Targhi, "Historiography and Crafting Iranian National Identity," 5–2; A. Amanat, "Memory and Amnesia in the Historiography of the Constitutional Revolution," 23–55; and A. Marashi, "The Nations Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination," 63–112. See also *ELr*: "Historiography: Pahlavi Period" (A. Amanat); F. Vejdani, "Purveyors of the Past: Iranian Historians and Nationalist Historiography, 1900–1941" (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 2009).
43. On the Iranian tribes' interaction with the state in the Qajar period and the Bakhtiari's incorporation to Iranian state through economy and communication, see A. Khazeni, *Tribes and Empire on the Margins of Nineteenth-Century Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010). On the Pahlavi treatment of nomads and sedentarization polices, see S. Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941* (London: Routledge, 2007). On early Pahlavi suppression of the popular protest and disciplining provincial notables, see idem, *Soldiers, Shahs, and Subalterns in Iran: Opposition Protest and Revolt, 1921–1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), esp. pt. 2, chap. 1 and 3. On state formation under Reza Shah, see also Atabaki and Zucher, *Men of Order*, chaps. 1 and 3.
44. On origins and development of conspiracy theories in Iran, see *ELr*: "Conspiracy Theory" (A. Ashraf); E. Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (London, I. B. Tauris, 1993), chaps. 3–4; and H. Chehabi, "The Paranoid Style of Iranian Historiography" in Atabaki, ed., *Iran in the 20th Century*, 155–76.
45. "Editorial," *Kaveh*, 2nd series, no. 1 (Berlin, Jumada I, 1338/ 22 Jan. 1920).
46. On Al-e Ahmad and Occidentosis see A. Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), chap. 5, and M. Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996). See also R. Mottahedeh, *Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), 287–315.
47. On the origins of the Great Satan see A. Amanat, "Khomeini's Great Satan: Demonizing the American Other in the Islamic Revolution in Iran," *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*, 199–220.
48. The culture of war with Iraq and its social implications still awaits a thorough study. For some preliminary observations see F. Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle against Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 365–70, 376–79, and Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, 275–76, 314–15. On the significance of martyrdom and apocalyptic dimension, see also A. Amanat, *Apocalyptic Islam and Iranian Shi'ism*, 67–69, 200–202.
49. For a study of Self and the Other see, for example, A. Ashraf, "The Crisis of National and Ethnic Identities in Contemporary Iran," *Iranian Studies* 26 (1993): 159–64, and G. Mehran, "The Presentation of 'Self' and the 'Other' in Postrevolutionary Iranian

- School Textbooks” in Keddie and Matthee, eds., *Iran and the Surrounding World*, 232–53.
50. See, for example, S. A. Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. chaps. 3–4.
 51. For the statistics see M. Moaddel and T. Azadarmarki, “The Worldview of the Islamic Republic: The Cases in Egypt, Iran and Jordan,” in *Comparative Sociology* 1, nos. 3–4 (2002): 299–319, cited in *EI*: “Iranian Identity IV: 19th and 20th Centuries” (A. Ashraf).
 52. See, for example, ‘A. Shari’ati, *Bazshenasi-e Hoviyyat-e Irani-Eslami* (Tehran: 1361/1982), and M. Motaahhari, *Kadamat-e Motaqabel-e Islam va Iran*, 8th ed. (Qom: 1357/1978).
 53. S. Sepehri, *Hajm-e Sabz* (Tehran: Rowzan, 1346/1967), 71.